



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

DEC 23 2009

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The Honorable Tom Oster
Secretary of Education
South Dakota Department of Education
700 Governors Drive
Pierre, South Dakota 57501-2291

Dear Secretary Oster:

I am pleased to approve South Dakota's science and "new" reading/language arts standards and assessments under Title I, Part A of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (ESEA), as amended. Combined with South Dakota's previously approved standards and assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics, South Dakota has a fully approved standards and assessment system under Title I of the ESEA. I congratulate you on this significant accomplishment.

My decision regarding South Dakota's science and "new" reading/language arts standards and assessments is based on input from peer reviewers external to the U.S. Department of Education (Department) and Department staff who reviewed and carefully considered the evidence submitted by South Dakota in June 2009 for the science peer review and November 2009 for the "new" reading/language arts peer review. I have concluded that the evidence provided demonstrates that South Dakota's science and "new" reading/language arts standards and assessments satisfy the statutory and regulatory requirements under section 1111(b)(1), (3) of the ESEA. As a result, South Dakota's standards and assessment system now includes academic content standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; student academic achievement standards in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; alternate academic achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science; general assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 and one grade in high school and general science assessments for each of three grade spans (grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12); and alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards in the corresponding grades in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science. Accordingly, South Dakota's standards and assessment system warrants *Full Approval with Recommendations*. This status means that, although South Dakota's standards and assessment system meets all statutory and regulatory requirements, it could be strengthened in certain respects. In particular, we recommend that South Dakota augment its Dakota STEP and Dakota STEP-A alignment improvement plans based on recent post-alignment study results and conduct quantitative analyses that describe the relationships among the reading STEP items and reading STEP sub-domains, such as confirmatory factor analysis and point-biserial correlations. I have enclosed detailed comments from both peer review teams that evaluated South Dakota's submissions for your information.

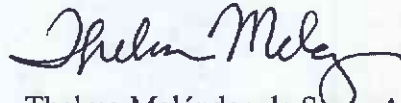
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The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

Please be aware that approval of South Dakota's standards and assessment system under the ESEA is not a determination that the system complies with Federal civil rights requirements, including Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, Title IX of the *Education Amendments of 1972*, Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, Title II of the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, and requirements under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Finally, please remember that, if South Dakota makes significant changes to its standards and assessment system, South Dakota must submit information about those changes to the Department for review and approval.

We have found it a pleasure working with your staff on this review. Please accept my congratulations for South Dakota's approved standards and assessment system in reading/language arts, mathematics, and science. I wish you well in your continued efforts to improve student achievement in South Dakota. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact David J. Harmon at (david.harmon@ed.gov) of my staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Thelma Meléndez', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Thelma Meléndez de Santa Ana, Ph.D.

Enclosure

cc: Governor Mike Rounds
Diane Lowery
Gay Pickner